

**COMMON ERRORS IN ENGLISH CONCORD - WAYS TO RECTIFY****Ms.Divya.C<sup>1</sup> & Dr.Banuramalakshmi. T<sup>2</sup>**

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**Abstract:** *The process of teaching a second language is different from learning a first language. Mother tongue acquisition is a natural process where as second language learning is a class-room activity. Naturally, a second language learner is liable to commit errors.*

*The ultimate aim of language teaching is to make the students achieve the ability of communicative performance. The student must be able to perform communicative functions with the help of the language they learn. The learner has to develop the ability is to recognize which function is fulfilled by a sentence in a particular communicative situation.*

*At present the school curriculum follows communicative approach to language teaching. But there is no valid result on the teaching and feed back of this approach. There it is important to test whether communicative elements are taught or not. Thus the present study is undertaken in order to find out the problems of learning English as a second language among the under graduate students especially problems in CONCORD.*

*The learners have to be given special attention in these problematic areas so as to make them overcome the problems faced by them.*

**Key words**

Natural learner, Alleged irrelevance, Valid result, Grammatical element, Overgeneralization

**Introduction**

Children acquire mother-tongue or first language in their home situation. They are exposed to the language directly in their childhood. Their acquisition is like that of a natural learner. Thus children's language acquisition takes place informally, so that they acquire the basic skills without knowing the fact that they are learning a language. Therefore the learning of mother-tongue takes place in a very natural way since the child is surrounded by an atmosphere where mother-tongue is being spoken.

Second language acquisition generally refers to the acquisition of another language after having acquired the basics of the first language. In India, English is being taught as a major second language. The ultimate aim of language teaching is to make the learner get proficiency in the language taught. The learner must be in a position to use language effectively in a real situation apart from the class-room use of language.

**Scope of the study**

College education in our country has always been subjected to severe criticism due to its conspicuous inability to cope with the growing academic requirements of the country. The chief

reason for this being the alleged irrelevance of the university courses to the needs of the contemporary India. This state of affairs is much truer of the present day English teaching in our college rather than anything else.

English courses in our colleges both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels are literature oriented.

In a country like India where English function at the level of L2 and where schools have certainly failed to impart the basic skills of English language, a continued emphasis on something other than actual down-to – earth language teaching would be futile. This is indeed a widely accepted fact. Our colleges need a language-oriented course with a view to equipping the students for various language requirements in their professional life. Instead, the students coming out of the colleges have neither language nor literature, the later without the former bring something difficult to visualize.

The condition of learning English as a language in schools and colleges is very poor. The learners as well as the teachers aim at the examination only. At the school level much focus is laid on science, commerce and accountancy pushing aside language classes. And at the college level also the scene is not much different. The students and teachers give much importance to their core subjects least bothering about the language classes.

At present the school curriculum follows communicative approach to language teaching. But there is no valid result on the teaching and feed back of this approach. There it is important to test whether communicative elements are taught or not. Thus the present study is undertaken in order to find out the problems of learning English as a second language among the under graduate students especially problems in CONCORD. Look at the following sentences.

- \* Flowers was very beautiful and colourful.
- \* My brother and I was playing with the dog.
- \* These chemicals makes the well water poisonous
- \* We feel for someone who are ill.
- \* This are our dream.
- \* Student are advised to bring the books.

In the above instances (1) – (6) the informants have used the singular verbs for plural subjects. Ignorance of English concord rules might have been the reason for the errors.

As the subject of sentence (1) is plural, the verb must also be plural. In sentences (2), (4), and (6), the subjects are plural; the verb must also be plural. In sentences (2),(4) and (6) the subjects are plural in form but the verbs are in singular form. The reason for the errors may be the wrong analogy.

In sentences (3) & (5), the subjects are compound forms conjoined by ‘and’. So the verb must be plural in form. But the informants have used singular forms of the verbs with them. The error may be categorized as developmental error.

In sentences (7) and (9), the informants have used plural verbs for singular subjects. Sentence (7) is a relative clause construction where the verb is in plural form and the subject, an indefinite pronoun ‘someone’ is singular in form. As the subject is singular, the verb should also

be singular in form. As the subject is singular, the verb should also be singular in form. The informants would have used the plural form of verb due to the presence of the plural pronoun in the sentence. The plural pronoun would have induced the informants to use the plural verb in the sentence.

Lack of knowledge in number concord is revealed by the errors committed by the informants. These errors may be classified as developmental errors.

### **Determiner- Noun Concord**

Determiner is a grammatical element whose main role is to co-occur with nouns to express such semantic elements as quantity and number: the, a, this, some, much, etc., are some of the determiners used in English language. The term is sometimes extended to include other types of word with noun phrase. Example: adjectives (International Encyclopedia of Linguistics, Vol IV, 1992)

A determiner must agree with its head noun in number.

### **Article –Noun Concord**

There should be correspondence in form between the noun and the article it takes. If the noun is singular then it takes a singular article.

A/an is used before a singular noun which is countable.'an' is used before words commencing with the pronunciation of a vowel (a,e,I,o,u) or words beginning with a mute h.

Example:

An apple

An hour

The definite article serves as a determiner with singular or plural count nouns and with non-count nouns.(Sidney Greenbaum, 1996)

Example:

the boy; the boys

the day; the days

the issue; the issues

The following errors were found in the writings of students under study with regard to article-noun concord.

1. \* This is a very dangerous disease for a people.
2. \*They are affected by very dangerous diseases.
3. \* The industries should be shifted to remote areas.
4. \* I sent him parcels yesterday.
5. \* It sometimes damages a people's ear or hearing system.
6. \* A disadvantages is that students must not go out.

In the sentences(1-6) given above, the informants have used plural form of nouns after the indefinite article ‘a’ which should be used before a singular noun only. Errors were not found in the use of ‘an’ and ‘the’. The reason for using plural nouns after ‘a’ may be lack of knowledge about singular or plural forms of nouns or ignorance about the use of indefinite article ‘a’ in sentences.

### Demonstrative- Noun Concord

Demonstratives are used at the beginning of noun phrases. The demonstratives this and that are followed by singular nouns and those and these are followed by plural count nouns. The demonstrative and noun should agree in number.

The following erroneous constructions were found among the students’ writing with regard to demonstrative – noun concord.

1. We should try to stop this activities.
2. I will try to solve these problems.
3. Send these parcel to my friend.
4. These type of character built their personalities.
5. This chemicals make the rain water poisonous.

Demonstrative-noun concord is very much essential in a sentence. The informants have used plural nouns with singular demonstratives and vice-versa. The errors may be due to the influence of the L1 of the learners where there is no number distinction in the demonstratives.

In the following table, the demonstratives available in both L1 and L2 of the informants are presented.

**TABLE 1: Demonstratives**

Distance	In English	In Tamil
Proximate	this(sin),these(plu)	Inta
Distant	that(sin), those(plu)	Anta

The primary demonstratives present two types of contrast. The first is a contrast in number. **This** and **that** are singular, whereas **these** and **those** are plural. The second is a contrast in proximity: **this**, **these** indicate relative nearness, and **that** and **those** indicate relative remoteness. The proximity may be in space or in time.

The informants, due to the influence of their mother tongue, have produced erroneous constructions in the L2. In modern Tamil for both these and this common form inta is used hence the students might have been influenced by it.

### Quantifier-Noun Concord

Quantifiers are used at the beginning of noun phrases. 'Many' is used before countable nouns. 'Each' and 'Every' are followed by a singular noun and verb, and 'many' is followed by a plural noun. There should be quantifier-noun concord in the sentences.

The following errors were found in the writings of the students in quantifier-noun concord.

1. \*When we travel in the train we feel so many happy.
2. \* Every small children was well coached.
3. \*Every human beings must be educated.
4. \*By drinking these kinds of water we are attacked by bacteria and virus and cause many disease.

The above errors reveal that the informants have problems in quantifier-noun concord also. The errors can be classified as developmental errors. In sentence (1), the quantifier 'many', that goes with a plural count noun had been used with an uncountable noun, 'happy'. Selection of quantifiers is very much important.

In sentences (2) and (3), 'every' is followed by plural count nouns. In sentence (4) the quantifier 'many' is used for a singular noun which is inappropriate as it does not agree in number with the noun. The noun should be plural in form.

It is seen from the samples that the learners produce sentences in which quantifiers do not agree in number with the nouns they qualify. The errors can be rectified if the students are taught and re-taught about the proper usage of quantifiers in sentences.

### Person Concord

Person, as a grammatical feature, involves the contrast among words which show that we are talking about ourselves (e.g. I, We = First person), words which show that we are talking about the listener (e.g. You = second person) and words which show that we are talking about someone or something else (e.g. He, she, it, the tree, the girls - third person) (Andrew Radford, 1988).

The subject and verb should agree in number and person. If the subject of a sentence is in third person then the present tense form of the verb must be an -'s' ending one (H. Ramsey Fowler, Jane E. Aaron, 1989).

#### Exercise –III

The following sentences were given to the students in order to identify their problems in person concord. The informants were asked to choose the correct answer from the options given.

1. Those questions \_\_\_\_\_ to be answered by the government. (has, have, is)
2. Many students \_\_\_\_\_ know the scope of various courses offered in Universities. (does not, do not, are)

3. He \_\_\_\_\_ to move the furniture himself(have, has,are)
4. I \_\_\_\_\_ to be there by five O'clock. (has,have, are)
5. He eats fish so\_\_\_\_\_ You. (does, do, are)

For sentence (1), the expected answer is have.

A statistical analysis of the types of informants' responses for the above sentence is present in the table below.

**TABLE 2: Students' Responses**

Students' Choices	Number of students (in percentage)
Have	46.3
Has	37.0
Is	16.7

#### Answers Given by the Informants

- a. Those questions\* have to be answered by the government.
- b. Those questions \*has to be answered by the government.
- c. Those questions \*is to be answered by the government.

It is found from the above table that 53.7% of the informants have selected the wrong choices from the options given. Only 46.3% of them were able to select the correct answer. The errors have resulted due to overgeneralization 37% of the informants would have over generalized as the subject ends on -'s', so the verb should also end in -'s'. The subject of the sentence is a third person plural not singular.

The second sentence in the list is

1. Many students \_\_\_\_\_(do not/does not /are) know the scope of various courses offered in Universities.

A statistical analysis of the students' responses is presented in the table below.

**TABLE 3: Students' Responses**

Students' Choices	Number of Students (in %)
Do not	49.3
Does not	42.3
Are	8.4

Answers given by the students

- (a) Many students \*do not know the scope of various courses offered in Universities.
- (b) Many students \*does not know the scope of various courses offered in Universities.
- (c) Many students \*are know the scope of various courses offered in Universities.

The informants were supposed to choose 'do not' from the options given as it is the correct form to be used with the third person plural subject.

Nearly 50% of the informants were able to select the correct choice from the options. 42.3% of the informants have chosen does not which is used with third person singular subjects. The error is result of overgeneralization.

8.4% of the informants have chosen 'are'. The reason for selecting 'are' may be that they know that plural form of 'be' should be used after a plural subject but failed to native the main verb following it. The error is a result of partial learning. The error may be classified as developmental error.

The next sentence that was given in the list is

2. He \_\_\_\_ (has/have/are) to move the furniture himself.

The following table presents a statistical analysis of the types of students' responses.

**TABLE 4: Students' Responses**

Students' Choices	Number of Students ( in %)
Have	36
Has	54
Are	10

**Answers given by the students**

- a. He \*has to move the furniture himself.
- b. He \*have to move the furniture himself.
- c. He \*are to move the furniture himself

More number of students has selected the correct answer from the choices given. This shows that the students are aware of the rule that third person singular subject take –s ending verbs.

46% of the informants were unable to select the correct answer. 36% of them have selected have which is inappropriate. Overgeneralization may be the reason for choosing it. 10% of the students have chosen are which is plural in form that does not agree with a third person's singular subject. This erroneous choice may also be due to overgeneralization.

The informants would not have noticed the reflexive pronoun in the sentence and the subject which is in third person singular form. The informants' lack of knowledge in concord resulted in the selection of erroneous forms.

For sentence (4)

I \_\_\_\_ (have/has/are) to be there by five o'clock.

The following table presents a statistical analysis of the types of students' responses with regard to the sentence above.

**TABLE 5: Students' Responses**

Students' Choices	Number of Students (in %)
Have	80.6
Has	17.4
Are	2

Answers given by the students

- a. I have to be there by five o'clock.
- b. I has to be there by five o'clock.
- c. I are to be there by five o'clock.

From table (12), it is explicit that more number of informants, that is, 80.6% of them were able to select the correct answer from the choices given. This reveals that the informants are aware of the fact that first person singular subjects take singular form of the verb.

The instances (b) and (c) may be due to overgeneralization. 17.4% of the informants have selected has that goes with a third person singular subject. Partial learning may be the reason for the learners' errors.

Only 2% of the informants have chosen the plural form of verb is that agrees with a plural subject. This choice or selection reveals the informants' lack of knowledge in English concord rules and their lack of exposure to the English.

The last sentence in the list is

5. He eats fish so \_\_\_\_\_ (does/do/are) you.

A statistical analysis of the students' responses is presented in the table below.



**TABLE 6: Students' Responses**

Students' Choices	Number of Students ( in %)
Do	5.4
Does	23.7
Are	22.3

Answers given by the informants

- a. He eats fish so \*do you.
- b. He eats fish so \*does you.
- c. He eats fish so \*are you.

The table (13) clearly reveals that more number of informants were able to select the expected answer from the choices given.

23.7% of the informants have selected does that is used with third person singular subjects. The reason for this choice might be due to the presence of a third person singular pronoun in the first part of the sentence. The subject for the space given is you. The answer does clearly reveals that the informants are not clear about S-V concord. 22.3% of the students have selected 'are'. Overgeneralization might be the reason for this erroneous choice. The first part of the sentence might not have been noticed by the informants. The errors may be classified as developmental errors.

The following errors were found with regard to person concord in the writings of the students in other exercises like paragraph writing, essay writing, etc.

1. I \*wants to study M.Tech.
2. The cat \*kill the rat.
3. He \*have to do their work.
4. He \*kill a rat.
5. He\* send me a fountain pen.

The above instances (1) to (5) clearly convey that the informants are not clear about concord rules.

In sentence (1), the subject and verb do not agree in person. Only third person subjects take –'s' ending verb; in other instances it should be in the base form (present tense). The error may be a result of overgeneralization.

In sentence (2), the subject is in third person singular but the verb is in its base form. As the subject is in third person singular, the verb should be an –'s' ending one.

The subjects of sentences (3),(4) and (5) are third person singular pronouns. But the verbs used with them are in their base form. The sentences reveal that the informants are not aware of concord rules.

The above errors might have occurred due to inadequate learning or due to over generalization

**Pronoun- Antecedent Concord.**

An exercise in which the students should select the appropriate pronoun from the given options was given to the informants to identify their problems in pronoun in pronoun-antecedent concord.

1. Ram or Lakshman should have raised \_\_\_\_\_hand.( his, their)
2. CBCS provides good chance for students to select the subject \_\_\_\_\_liked (he, they)
3. The audience rose quietly from \_\_\_\_\_seats. (his, their)
4. Everyone in the team had \_\_\_\_\_own locker (their, his)
5. A group of students joined the science club to improve\_\_\_\_\_knowledge in science and technology. (his,their)

**Expected Answer****1. Ram or Lakshman should have raised his hand.**

When parts of an antecedent are joined by ‘or’ or ‘nor’, the pronoun should agree with the part next to it.

A statistical analysis of the informants’ choices for sentence (1) is presented in the following table.

**TABLE 7: Students’ choices**

Students’ Choices	Number of Students ( in %)
Their	75.4
His	24.6

The above table clearly shows that more number of informants have chosen the inappropriate answer from the choices. The erroneous selection might be due to confusion as the sentence contains two nouns in the subject position conjoined by ‘or’ between the two proper nouns. The informants would have thought the subject to be a compound one and have selected the plural pronoun ‘their’ as their choice. The error might be categorized as developmental error.

The next sentence in the exercise is

2. CBCS provides good chance for students to select the subject \_\_\_\_\_liked.

As the antecedents are plural, the pronoun should also be plural. The expected answer for sentence (2) is they.

The statistical analysis of the students’ choice is presented in the table below.

**TABLE 8: Students' choices**

Informants' Choices	Number of Students (in %)
They	96
He	4

Only 4% of the informants were able choose the wrong choice form the options. The wrong selection may be due to inadequate learning. The rest of the informants were able to select the correct answer. The pronoun and ante cent should agree in number. Person and gender. The choice 'he' does not agree in number and gender with the antecedent.

**Expected Answer**

3. The audience rose quietly from their seats.

The following table presents a statistical analysis of the informants' choices in this regard.

**TABLE 9:Students' choices**

Students selection	Number of Students (in %)
Their	86
His	14

The expected answer for sentence (3) is their.

From the table above, it is clear that a number of students commit errors is pronoun-antecedent concord. 14% of the informant shave selected the inappropriate choice.

86% of the informants selected the appropriate answer from the choices given. The answer 'his' is incorrect as it does not agree with the antecedent in number and gender. The sentence given does not denote masculine gender and singular form. As the antecedent is singular in form by plural in meaning, the students would have selected 'his' 'without thinking about the gender of the antecedent. The error can be called as developmental error.

**Expected Answer**

4. Everyone in the team had his own locker.

The following table presents a statistical analysis of the informants' choices of the sentence above.

**TABLE 10:Informants' selection**

Students' selection	percentage of Students
His	32
Their	68

The table above clearly portrays that only 32% of the Informants were able to select the correct choice. 68% of the informants have chosen the inappropriate answer from the choices given for the sentence. The error would have been due to the presence of collective noun team which is singular in form but plural in meaning and they would not have noticed the indefinite pronoun everyone leading the antecedent in the sentence. The students who selected his would have noticed the indefinite pronoun in the sentence.

The last sentence given in the exercise is

5. A group of students joined the science club to improve \_\_\_\_ (their, his) knowledge in science and technology.

As the antecedent is plural in form, the pronoun should also be plural.

A statistical analysis of the students' choices is presented in the following table.

**TABLE 11:Students' Choices**

Students' selection	percentage of Students
Their	73.8
His	21.7

The above table shows that 21.7% of the informants have selected the incorrect answer which does not agree in number and gender with the antecedents. More number of students were able to select the expected answer. The reason for the error might be partial learning.

The following errors were found in the students' own constructions with regard to pronoun antecedent concord.

1. \* she/he have to do their work.
2. \* I f she/ he is a hostel student they have to get up early in the morning.
3. \* If she/he is in college they miss their family members love and affection.

It is found from the samples that students do not know the concord rules of the English language. The sentences above do not have person, number and gender concord.

## Tense Concord

The tense form of the verb and the temporal adverb should have concordance with each other. The following samples were found among the writings of the informants in this regard.

1. \* Now –a-days terrosism was popular in the world.
2. \* The terrorists kill the M.P yesterday.
3. \* Ram kill a tiger today morning.
4. \* I see my friend yesterday.
5. \*In olden days train are run by coal.

In Instance (1), the word ‘Now-a days’ denotes action taking place at present where as the verb was denotes action that has taken place or completed.

In instance(2) and (4), the tense form of the verb does not agree with the advdverb Yesterday which indicates past tense. In instance (3) too the temporal adverb today will not go with the verb kill in the construction. In the sentence (5) there is no concord between the adverb of time and verb, the subject train and the verb are.

Instances (1),(2) and (4) can be grouped or called as intra lingual errors as the sentences are correct when considered omitting the temporal adverbs. Sentences (3) and (5) can be considered as developmental errors. Concord between the verb and adverb is also essential when constructing sentences. Overgeneralization and lack of knowledge with regard to verb-adverb concord might be the reason for the errors found among the informants.

It is seen form the samples that more number of errors occur in subject-verb concord when compared to pronoun –antecedent concord and determiner –noun concord. More number of errors were found in number concord.

The following table shows the errors committed by the informants quantitatively in concord in their own constructions.

**TABLE 12: Errors in English Concord**

Errors in	Number of Students ( in %)
Subject –verb concord	24.4
Pronoun –Antecedent concord	8.1
Article-Noun concord	16.2
Quantifier-Noun concord	10.8
Demonstrative- Noun concord	13.5
Person concord	13.5
Tense concord	13.5

The table above reveals that the informants commit more number of errors in subject-verb concord. The reason for the errors might be their lack of knowledge in subject-verb

concord. The informants construct sentence without adequate knowledge of English concord rules.

Problems in pronoun- antecedent concord may be due to misconception or over generalization. Proper care and practice can rectify the errors.

The problems in article-noun concord may be due to lack of knowledge. Problems in demonstrative noun concord were found to be due to the influence of L1. Partial learning might have been the reason for the problems in quantifier- noun concord.

The informants' errors clearly portray or reveal that they are not clear about concord rules. Number concord happens to a more problematic area than concord problems.

### **Conclusion**

The learners have to be given special attention in these problematic areas so as to make them overcome the problems faced by them.

The problems in concord appear to be more in number concord (64.9%); the reasons for which were found to be ignorance of the rules of the language and due to over generalization. Out of the 64.9% of errors in number concord, 40.5% of them were found to be due to determiner-noun concord, 24.4% of them were found due to subject- verb agreement. To overcome the problems pertaining to concord, the teachers have to teach and re teach the rules of the language clearly. The exceptional rules should also be taught through which confusions could be avoided. The concord rules of the English language have to be taught carefully with appropriate examples among the syntactic problems; problems in concord seem to be predominant. Hence proper care has to be taken in order to avoid the errors

Tasks such as

1. Fill up the blanks with appropriate verb forms given in brackets
2. Match the following
3. Fill in the blanks with appropriate noun forms. Eg: These \_\_\_\_\_(girl/girls) are playing in the ground.

Through these types of tasks the teachers can teach the concord rules of the English language effectively.

In teaching English to our students, we must aim at making them efficient users of the language, able to use the language for all their needs of communication.

Most school teachers of English are now required to teach grammar" to their students, and this is generally the part of the syllabus that is least popular. So this type of study may be conducted among the teachers those who are in service, college students, professionals also.

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